

The Use of Bells at Mass

By Reverend Michael Guadagnoli

When I first arrived here at St. Pius X, I noticed something missing in my experience at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. I did not hear the “*Sanctus bells*” during the Consecration. After prayer and considering what I had observed in the liturgy, I decided to reinstate the venerable custom of the use of the bells at Mass. The practice of the use of bells during Mass is neither mandated nor forbidden. According to the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*: “A little before the consecration, when appropriate, a server rings a bell as a signal to the faithful. According to local custom, the server also rings the bell as the priest shows the host and then the chalice. If incense is used, a server incenses the host and the chalice when each is shown to the people after the consecration (no. 150).”

The use of the bells is done at the discretion of the pastor. Whether there are bells or not does nothing against the sacramental validity of the Mass. Part of my reasoning for the renewed use of the bells is that they have great catechetical value. Everything we do at Mass is done for the honor and glory of God. Fresh flowers, sacred music, etc. all help to make the Mass more ornate. Their good use shows us that the liturgy is something more than the ordinary. Something supernatural is taking place.

Although there are angels who adore Our Lord in every Mass, we also have to remember that there are human beings also present! And we as human beings are sensory creatures. Part of the reason that we use the different colors of the vestments, the beeswax candles, the incense, sacred music, the bread, the wine, and the bells, is that they help us to experience the reality of the sacred encounter with Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on Calvary.

The bells can also help to remind us to participate fully in the Mass. I remember reading about parents who were “saved by the bell” with their young children. Not only could the bells help them to be reminded of what was happening should they be distracted, but the bells could also be a teaching tool concerning the Real Presence of Christ. In any case, bells can also be a way to glorify God as we gaze upon His Sacred Body and Blood.

There are three principal times when the bells are rung at Mass. At the *epiclesis*, when the priest extends hands over the gifts, saying “Bless and approve our offering...Let it become for us the body and blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ.” This is an extraordinary time in the Mass. From the *Catechism of the Catholic Church 1105: The Epiclesis* (“invocation upon”) is the intercession in which the priest begs the Father to send the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, so that the offerings may become the body and blood of Christ and that the faithful by receiving them, may themselves become a living offering to God. Then the bells are rung at the

consecration and elevation of the Sacred Host, and again for the Precious Blood in the chalice. Here we are called to adore Our Lord, remembering that we have the opportunity to speak to Him from our heart: "My Lord and my God."

We live in a time when many Catholics no longer believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. They see the Eucharist (Holy Communion) as only a symbol or a metaphor. As we work at better catechesis to teach the truth that Jesus is Present, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity in the Eucharist (Holy Communion), the *Sanctus* bells are a beautiful way for us to help reaffirm this belief.

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Memorial of St. Thomas Aquinas who authored these beautiful Eucharistic hymns:
Adoro te devote, O Salutaris, Tantum ergo, and Pange lingua

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